

**WYCOMBE HIT
BACK AFTER
EARLY SHOCK**

By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 1, Ilford 1

AFTER two high scoring victories, Wycombe Wanderers were predictably held to a draw when they took on Ilford at Loakes Park on Saturday. This game looked a cert draw before a ball was kicked, so evenly matched were the teams.

Although Wanderers came out with only one point from this encounter, I should think they're fairly satisfied. One has only to look through the Ilford team to find the reason. The Essex club have, second to Enfield, the best set of players individually in the league. For instance, Terry Moore is one of the top goalkeepers in Division One, John Still and Peter Deadman are two of the best central defenders on the circuit while Tony Bass and John Butterfield are highly experienced and able competitors. Throw in Roger Day, Gwynne Walters and a few more and you have a pretty fair side.

Ilford, though, have one slight weakness — midfield. Day is now in the veteran stage of his career while former Wanderer Peter Anderson is a natural defender and Steve Barratt had only just recovered from a bout of tonsilitis. If Wycombe were going to win on Saturday, they had to dominate this department. They never quite pulled it off. Dave Alexander was the pick of the home trio and seems to improve with every game. Wanderers certainly had the better of things in the middle but were never in complete control.

The main battle on Saturday was between the two defences. Both were extremely efficient and gave very little away, making the match a rather disappointing spectacle but nonetheless an interesting battle between two good sides.

Chances, although few and far between, came and went with shots blocked on the line and Ilford hitting the crossbar. Overall, however, things just about evened themselves up and most people felt the 1-1 draw was a fair reflection of the game, although Wycombe did hold a territorial advantage.

The Blues kept the side that beat Hendon in midweek, still without injured skipper John Delaney. And before some of the home side had touched the ball, they found themselves trailing. Almost from the kick off, Ilford won a corner. Day sent the ball deep into the six yard box where Butterfield, not the tallest of men, was allowed to head home with surprising ease. It seemed Wycombe were too intent on covering the giant Bass while John Maskell might have come off his line to clear the danger.

The early set-back took its toll on Wycombe and it was not until the 10th minute that Dave Alexander got in the first strike, Moore saving comfortably. But two minutes later the Blues seemed certain to score in one of the longest goalmouth scrambles for a long time. Terry Reardon's pass was deflected to Dylan Evans, five yards out. The Welshman could hardly believe his luck and took too long to get in a shot. When it did come, the defence was massed on the line and Reardon and Horseman both had efforts blocked in a real frenzy. The ball, however, refused to go between those posts.

Ilford were visibly worried by the incident and John "back pass" Still brought his usual bout of boos from the crowd

with his unpopular tactic. It should be added, however, that the Ilford centre half hardly missed one ball in the air and gave Evans a hard time. Similarly, Dave Bullock struggled against the height of Bass, but he did improve as the match progressed.

One of Evans' few clear headers almost produced a goal in the 19th minute. He climbed up well to a free kick and sent the ball towards the top corner. Russell Mumford was on the line to head away. Then Ilford almost repeated their first goal soon afterwards. This time Still was allowed a free header from eight yards and can count himself unlucky not to have found the net. He headed the ball down to the ground and watched it bounce onto the crossbar. Once again Wycombe were caught from a set piece with no one attacking the ball to clear the danger.

Steadily, Wanderers began to

win more of the ball for themselves but they seemed to concentrate too much on the top wing. Geoff Anthony was held firmly in check on the flank and Wanderers found it difficult to break down Ilford's rugged defence. They also had a tendency to play the ball in the air too much, allowing Still and Deadman to show their ability to the full. Whenever the ball was played on the ground, their swift passing had the visiting defence in far more trouble.

Two incidents in the 40th minute might have brought a goal for the Blues. Mick Holifield was only inches away from Anthony's cross and then Tony Horseman bent a free kick around the wall and watched as Moore almost allowed it to go through his fingers. At half time, Ilford were still a goal up.

Wycombe were forced to bring in Tony Price for Anthony at the interval. Geoff struggling with a groin injury. Price looked extremely useful and his pace

gave Ilford quite a few headaches in the second half. A more mature and physically stronger player now, Price could find himself a regular place in the side if he can learn to combine with his fellow front men.

Wycombe began the new half much refreshed and were soon pressing hard. Evans seemed to have equalised when he vollied past Moore after 53 minutes but the linesman's flag was already raised for offside. Then Horseman and Price set up the equaliser. Reardon started the move with a lovely through ball to Horseman. He squared the ball back inside to Price who sprinted towards the net only to be upended by Mumford. Horseman left Moore standing bewildered as he rifled home the penalty.

Ilford replied quickly and Wanderers had Maskell to thank for preventing a certain second goal. Keith Mead's clearance struck Reardon and bounced right into the path of Butterfield. He had only the goalkeeper to beat but Maskell came out and spread himself well to block the shot.

After that, Wycombe began to get the better of things. Alexander worked tirelessly in midfield while Reardon showed a marked improvement after the interval. They forced a string of corners during the second half but Ilford's defence held firm every time, denying the home forwards of any clear chances. A word of praise for Mr. Prevett, a new referee on the circuit this season. He handled the match extremely well, used his whistle only when necessary and clamped down on the few nasty incidents that occurred.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Bullock, R. Eaton; D. Alexander, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, D. Evans, G. Anthony (sub. A. Price 45 mins.).

ILFORD: T. Moore; R. Mumford, P. Deadman, J. Still, G. Waters; S. Barrett, P. Anderson, R. Day; J. Butterfield, A. Bass, C. Brown. Sub. D. Holden (not used).

Referee: G. Prevett (New Malden). **Half time:** 0-1. **Goalscorers:** Ilford — Butterfield, P. Day. Wycombe — Horseman, P. Reardon (56).

Official paying attendance: 1,638. **Approx. total attendance:** 1,950.